

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

First-In First-Out Memory System With Single Bit Collision Detection

CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This case is related to U.S. Patent Application _____, entitled
5 "First-In First-Out Memory System With Shift Register Fill Indication" (TI-36899), filed on
the same date as the present application.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR
DEVELOPMENT

10 [0002] Not Applicable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present embodiments relate to electronic devices and circuits and are more
particularly directed to such devices and circuits that include a first-in first-out ("FIFO")
15 memory system with a single bit indication of an addressed word location in the FIFO.

[0004] Electronic circuits are prevalent in numerous applications, including those
used in personal, business, and other devices. Demands of the marketplace affect many
aspects of the design of these circuits, including factors such as device complexity, size,
and cost. Various of these electronic circuits include some aspect of digital signal
20 processing and, quite often, these circuits include storage devices that operate on a FIFO
basis. As is well-known in the art, such FIFO circuits are so named because data words
are read from the circuit in the same order as they were written to the circuit. As a storage
device, the FIFO is also sometimes referred to as a FIFO memory or as a FIFO random

access memory ("RAM"). Typically, a FIFO is a logical array for storing a number of data words. The size of each data word in the FIFO depends on the application and may be any number of bits, where 4 bits, 8 bits, 16 bits, and 32 bits are common examples, while any number of bits per word may be implemented based on the application.

5 [0005] A FIFO has a number of word storage locations, and typically in the prior art any of these locations may be indicated, or "addressed," during operation of the FIFO by both a read pointer and a write pointer. Typically, the read pointer indicates the word storage location from which a next word will be read, and the write pointer indicates the word storage location into which a next word will be written. The number of word
10 storage locations in a given FIFO also is typically dictated at least in part by the application. In view of that application, the FIFO design is often determined in an effort to satisfy data requirements while minimizing this number of storage locations so as to avoid unnecessarily enlarging the FIFO. Typically, however, with the designed minimized number of word storage locations, there is an expectation that the pointers may at some
15 instance point to a same word storage location, which in the art is referred to as a collision. When a collision occurs, often an interrupt or the like is generated, because in this condition there is the possibility of an imminent data corrupting action. For example, in a FIFO having word storage locations 0 through Z, if a word has been written into location 0 and the write pointer then points to location 1, consider next that a read occurs of the
20 word at location 0 and the read pointer then also points to location 1. Thus, both pointers point to the same FIFO location. Without any additional action, if the next FIFO operation is a read, then the data read will be at a location that has not yet been written, thereby providing invalid data for the read. As a result, this collision must be detected so as to warn, or prevent, the system from relying on invalid data. As another example in that
25 same FIFO, if Z words have been written into locations 0 through Z of that same FIFO and the write pointer then wraps around to location 0 without any read occurring, then again both pointers point to the same FIFO location. Without any additional action, if the next FIFO operation is a write, then the valid data at location 0, which has not yet been read, will be overwritten. Thus, this collision also must be detected.

[0006] In an effort to respond to pointer collisions in a FIFO, the prior art has developed various systems based on monitoring the read and write pointers relative to one another. In these systems, the prior art pointers are typically multiple-bit digital values that numerically identify each word storage location. For example, for the above instance of a FIFO with locations 0 through $Z=2^N-1$, then both the read pointer and the write pointer consist of incrementing modulo counters with N bits that increment through the values of 0 through 2^N-1 and then start once more at 0 (or vice versa for decrementing counters). Often each such counter is referred to as a pointer vector in that each such vector has multiple bits, where at least one of those multiple bits, by definition, is a different value for each of the 2^N different addresses of the FIFO. Given this implementation of pointers, the prior art manner of detecting collisions typically compares the two pointers, where a collision is detected if the pointers have the same counter values. The comparison may be implemented using arithmetic computations such as through use of a comparator or subtracting unit, by ways of example. However, the present inventors have observed that in certain FIFOs, and particularly in asynchronous FIFOs, these techniques may become quite extensive. Specifically, in asynchronous FIFOs, a read may occur according to one timing domain that is independent of when a write may occur, that is, the read and write operations, and pointers, are asynchronous with respect to one another. As a result, as a necessary element of the pointer comparison technique described above, the prior art also involves a complex manner of taking the value of one pointer into the clock domain of the other pointer so as to provide an accurate comparison of the two to avoid metastability problems. In other words, without such an action, by time a first pointer (e.g., read) is copied and compared to a second pointer (e.g., write), the first pointer may be in the process of changing; further, since each pointer address is represented by a vector, and if that vector is changing at the time it is copied, then some bits in the vector may contain the value before the change while others contain the new value. In this case, the captured vector value would not just be either the previous value or the new value but some totally unknown address instead. Thus, the prior art includes additional circuitry for attempting to accommodate this necessary crossing over of one pointer into the other pointer's time domain. This additional circuitry adds complexity,

which consequently increases device size, cost, and power consumption, all of which are undesirable in circuit design, particularly in today's competitive marketplace.

[0007] In view of the above, the preferred embodiments as set forth below seek to improve upon the prior art as well as its associated drawbacks.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] In the preferred embodiment, there is an electronic device. The device comprises a memory structure comprising an integer M of word storage locations. The device further comprises a shift register for storing a sequence of bits. The sequence in the
5 shift register comprises a number of bits equal to a ratio of $1/R_1$ times the integer M . The device further comprises circuitry for providing a clock cycle to the shift register for selected data operations with respect to any of the word storage locations. The selected data operations are a data read or a data write. In response to each clock cycle, received from the circuitry for providing the clock cycle, the shift register shifts the sequence.
10 Further, one bit in the sequence corresponds to an indication of one of the memory word storage locations from which a word will be read or into which a word will be written.

[0009] Other aspects are also disclosed and claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

[0010] Figure 1 illustrates a block diagram of a portion of the data storage system according to the preferred embodiments.

5 [0011] Figure 2a illustrates one aspect of the operation according to the preferred embodiment as directed to a shifting operation of shift registers SR_{WT} and SR_{RD} for write and read domains respectively.

[0012] Figure 2b illustrates the continuing operation of system 10 in Figure 2a following a total of five additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and of seven additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD} .

10 [0013] Figure 3a illustrates system 10 of Figure 1, with an additional aspect directed to detecting pointer collision and therefore designated by way of distinction as a system 10₁.

[0014] Figure 3b illustrates system 10₁ of Figure 3a and further depicts an instance of a pointer collision.

15 [0015] Figure 4a illustrates system 10₁ of Figures 3a and 3b, with additional aspects directed to detecting a pointer collision at any location of FIFO memory 12 and therefore designated by way of distinction as a system 10₂.

[0016] Figure 4b illustrates the continuing operation of system 10₂ of Figure 4a following a total of four additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and of twelve additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD} .

20 [0017] Figure 5a illustrates a system 10₃ that is the same as system 10₂ of Figures 4a and 4b, with a modification to the binary string stored in both shift registers SR_{WT} and SR_{RD} and thereby presenting yet another alternative preferred embodiment.

25 [0018] Figure 5b illustrates the continuing operation of system 10₃ of Figure 5a following a total of six additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and of eleven additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD} .

[0019] Figure 5c illustrates the continuing operation of system 10₃ of Figure 5b following a total of three additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and of four additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD}.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] Figure 1 illustrates a block diagram of a data storage system designated generally at 10 according to the preferred embodiments, where certain preferred aspects of system 10 are not shown but are added in later figures so as to simplify the present discussion. In one preferred embodiment, system 10 is constructed using a single integrated circuit. Additional circuitry may be included within such an integrated circuit such as circuitry using the data stored in system 10. However, to simplify the present illustration and discussion, such additional circuitry is neither shown nor described. Moreover, system 10 may be implemented in connection with numerous digital data systems, where one skilled in the art may ascertain such systems.

[0021] Looking to the blocks in system 10, system 10 includes various items which in general are known in the prior art, but additional collision-detection aspects as well as related control and operation distinguishes the overall system as detailed later. Looking by way of introduction to some of the blocks that are comparable to the prior art, they include a first-in first-out ("FIFO") memory 12 having a number M of word storage locations; by way of example, $M=16$ such storage locations are shown and designated SL0 through SL15 and, thus, M also may be represented as $2^N=2^4=M$. However, the choice of $N=4$ and $M=16$ is only by way of illustration and one skilled in the art will recognize that the inventive teachings of this document may be implemented in different sized FIFO devices. In the preferred embodiment, each storage location SL_x has a same B -bit dimension, where that dimension may be any size. Also included in system 10 are a write pointer PTR_{WT} and a read pointer PTR_{RD} . Write pointer PTR_{WT} indicates the word storage location of FIFO memory 12 into which a next word will be written. Read pointer PTR_{RD} indicates the word storage location of FIFO memory 12 from which a next word will be read. As detailed below, however, the advancement of each such pointer is either indicated or tracked in a novel manner consistent with the preferred embodiments. System 10 also includes a data read/write circuit 14 that is bi-directionally connected to each word storage location in FIFO memory 12. Thus, data to be written to FIFO memory 12 is provided to an input 14_i of data read/write circuit 14 and is written to the storage

location indicated by write pointer PTR_{WT} , and data when read out of FIFO memory 12 from a location indicated by read pointer PTR_{RD} is provided at output 14_O of data read/write circuit 14. Data read/write circuit 14 may be constructed in various manners.

[0022] Turning now to aspects of system 10 as part of the overall inventive structure, system 10 includes a controller 16 coupled to data read/write circuit 14. In addition, controller 16 provides a write clock signal CLK_{WT} to a write shift register SR_{WT} and a read clock signal CLK_{RD} to a read shift register SR_{RD} . In the preferred embodiment, each shift register SR_{WT} and SR_{RD} is M bits in length, that is, it is the same number in bits as the number of word storage locations in FIFO memory 12. Preferably, each shift register SR_{WT} and SR_{RD} also is a wraparound device, that is, in response to a respective clock signal each register shifts each bit of its contents one location toward its most significant bit ("MSB") and the MSB bit value wraps around to the least significant bit ("LSB") location as is known in the shift register art. This wraparound functionality of each shift register is shown in Figure 1 by way of respective dotted arrows from the MSB to the LSB of each shift register.

[0023] As further explored below, in one preferred embodiment, one bit in each shift register SR_{WT} and SR_{RD} is loaded with one binary value of one, while the remaining bits of the shift register are loaded with a binary value of zero. In operation, each binary value of a one in this regard corresponds to the pointer for the respective shift register. Looking at this aspect with respect to write shift register SR_{WT} , the sole binary value of one in it corresponds to the location of write pointer PTR_{WT} . In the example of Figure 1, therefore, the sole binary value of one in write shift register SR_{WT} is located at its bit location of 8 (counting, starting from 0, from the lowermost bit location in the Figure), and this value corresponds to the location of write pointer PTR_{WT} which identifies word storage location SL8 in FIFO memory 12. Note, therefore, that write shift register SR_{WT} may be used to directly provide the write pointer, or in an alternative embodiment that pointer may be provided by a separate circuit, including a counter, whereby at the same time that the separate circuit is advanced by write clock CLK_{WT} , so is the shifted value in write shift register SR_{WT} , so that in all instances the location of the binary one in write shift register

SR_{WT} tracks the then-indicated word storage location in FIFO memory 12 by write pointer PTR_{WT}. Looking at the same binary loading aspect described above but now in connection with read shift register SR_{RD}, the sole binary value of one in it corresponds to the location of read pointer PTR_{RD}. In the example of Figure 1, therefore, the sole binary value of one in read shift register SR_{RD} is located at its bit location of 0 (assuming that location 0 is the lowermost bit location in the Figure), and this value corresponds to the location of read pointer PTR_{RD} which identifies word storage location SL0 in FIFO memory 12. Read shift register SR_{RD} may be used to directly provide the read pointer, or in an alternative embodiment that pointer may be provided by a separate circuit, including a counter, whereby at the same time that the separate circuit is advanced by read clock CLK_{RD}, so is the shifted value in read shift register SR_{RD}, so that in all instances the location of the binary one in read shift register SR_{RD} tracks the then-indicated word storage location in FIFO memory 12 by read pointer PTR_{RD}. These aspects are further explored in the remainder of this document.

[0024] Figure 2a illustrates one aspect of the operation of system 10 according to the preferred embodiment, as directed to the above-introduced shifting operation of shift registers SR_{WT} and SR_{RD}. Specifically, Figure 2a illustrates system 10 following two cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and one cycle of read clock CLK_{RD}, which is a possible scenario given the asynchronous nature of these two clocks with respect to one another. With reference to the two cycles of write clock CLK_{WT}, each period of write clock CLK_{WT} is provided by controller 16 to write shift register SR_{WT}. In response to each period, write shift register SR_{WT} shifts each bit it stores one location toward its MSB, with a wraparound of the bit from its MSB to its LSB. Accordingly, the binary value of one shown in location 8 of Figure 1 is shifted, in response to the two clock cycles of write clock CLK_{WT}, to location 10 in Figure 2a. Further, because write pointer PTR_{WT} is either directly provided, or tracked, by write shift register SR_{WT}, then Figure 2a also illustrates the advancement of write pointer PTR_{WT} from storage location SL8 in Figure 1 to storage location SL10 in Figure 2a. With reference to the one cycle of read clock CLK_{RD}, the period of read clock CLK_{RD} is provided by controller 16 to read shift register SR_{RD}. In response, read shift register SR_{RD} shifts each bit it stores one location toward its MSB, with a wraparound of

the bit from its MSB to its LSB. Accordingly, the binary value of one shown in location 0 of Figure 1 is shifted, in response to the one clock cycle of read clock CLK_{RD} , to location 1 in Figure 2a. Further, because read pointer PTR_{RD} is either directly provided, or tracked, by read shift register SR_{RD} , then Figure 2a also illustrates the advancement of read pointer PTR_{RD} from storage location SL0 in Figure 1 to storage location SL1 in Figure 2a.

[0025] Figure 2b illustrates the continuing operation of system 10 by continuing with an example following the state shown in Figure 2a. Specifically, Figure 2b illustrates system 10 following a total of five additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and of seven additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD} , where these cycles occur asynchronously with respect to one another and may occur in various fashions whereby certain ones of the cycles in one domain (i.e., either read or write domain) may be interspersed between cycles in the other domain. In response to the five additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} , write shift register SR_{WT} shifts its contents five times, thereby advancing the sole value of one in that shift register to bit location 15, thereby causing, or tracking, the positioning of write pointer PTR_{WT} to word storage location SL15 in FIFO memory 12. In response to the seven additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD} , read shift register SR_{RD} shifts its contents seven times, thereby advancing the sole value of one in that shift register to bit location 8 and causing, or tracking, the positioning of read pointer PTR_{RD} to word storage location SL8 in FIFO memory 12.

[0026] From the example of Figure 2b, one skilled in the art should appreciate the general nature of the advancement of shift register values and the corresponding advancement of pointers in system 10, with the remaining discussion pertaining to additional aspects directed to collision detection in FIFO memory 12. However, before proceeding, note that the one-to-one correspondence of M bit locations in each shift register with the M word storage locations in FIFO memory 12 is only one preferred embodiment. In an alternative embodiment, each shift register may have a number of bit locations equal to a ratio $1/R$ of the M word storage slots in FIFO memory 12, where the value R could differ for each shift register. As an example with R equal to the same value for each shift register, and for $R=2$, FIFO memory 12 may have $M=64$ word storage

locations while each shift register (or one such register) has $1/R \cdot M = 1/2 \cdot 64 = 32$ bit locations (i.e., in this case, the ratio is $1/2$). In any event, then the shift register shifts its binary sequence once every R times its corresponding pointer is advanced (i.e., clocked) with respect to FIFO memory 12, where in the present example $R=2$ and, thus, the shift register shifts for every $R=2$ times the corresponding pointer is advanced. Note also that the example of Figure 2b, therefore, merely represents the instance where $R=1$, so both shift registers have $1/R \cdot M$ bit locations, and each shift register shifts its binary sequence every time its corresponding pointer is advanced with respect to FIFO memory 12 because $R=1$. These aspects will be further appreciated by one skilled in the art given the remaining discussion of this document, as well as the implications of how it might slightly affect the timing of a collision detection. For sake of simplifying the discussion, however, the remaining illustrations are directed to the instance where each shift register has a number of M bit locations and, thus, each such register shifts its binary pattern once for each advancement of its corresponding FIFO pointer.

[0027] The example of pointer position in Figure 2b, in combination with the example of pointer position in Figure 1, further demonstrates an aspect with respect to the preferred resetting of FIFO memory 12. Particularly, the pointer position in Figure 1 depicts a preferable spacing of write pointer PTR_{WT} and read pointer PTR_{RD} upon reset, which may occur at start-up or as a response following a pointer collision, which is detected according to the preferred embodiments as detailed later. Specifically, in the preferred embodiment, for a FIFO having M word storage locations, then upon reset, read pointer PTR_{RD} and write pointer PTR_{WT} are spaced apart a distance of $M/2$ storage locations, as may be achieved through control of controller 16. Thus, the reset sequence of bits in read shift register SR_{RD} is offset from the reset sequence of bits in write shift register SR_{WT} by a distance of $M/2$. This separation, along with the expectation that over time the frequency of each pointer clock is approximately the same as the other pointer clock, reduces the chance that either pointer will advance to collide with the other. Looking then to Figure 2b, it illustrates, relative to Figure 2a, a total advancement of seven storage locations by read pointer PTR_{RD} and a total advancement of five storage locations by write pointer PTR_{WT} . Thus, as of that time, there is still a considerable storage location distance

between the two pointers. In addition, note that the reset position of Figure 1 will cause the first eight reads of FIFO memory 12 to provide invalid data, as those reads will span storage locations SL0 through SL7, where valid data has not yet been written because write pointer PTR_{WT} is reset to indicate storage location SL8. With this knowledge of the preferred reset positioning, one skilled in the art may ascertain various fashions to ensure that the first eight reads are indicated as invalid. However, once read pointer PTR_{RD} reaches storage location SL8 in a first instance following a reset, and as shown in Figure 2b, and assuming that no collision then occurs with write pointer PTR_{WT} , that is, assuming write pointer PTR_{WT} has advanced such as also shown by way of example in Figure 2b, then the next read will be of valid data. Once more, one skilled in the art may ascertain various fashions to ensure that such reads are indicated as valid.

[0028] Figure 3a illustrates system 10 of Figure 1, with an additional aspect and therefore for sake of distinction the system is shown and referred to as system 10₁. System 10₁ includes various of the same components of system 10 from Figure 1, where for sake of convenience and understanding the reference numbers for these same items are carried forward from Figure 1 into Figure 3a (and Figure 3b, discussed below). Thus, the reader is referred to the previous discussion for details on such aspects. Looking then to the additional aspect of system 10₁ over system 10, system 10₁ includes a pointer collision detecting circuit 18. In the preferred embodiment, pointer collision detecting circuit 18 consists of a single stage logic circuit having inputs connected to a same bit location within each of write shift register SR_{WT} and read shift register SR_{RD} . More particularly, in the illustrated and preferred embodiment, the single stage consists of a two-input AND gate 18_{AND}, with a first input 18_{IN1} connected to bit location 0 of write shift register SR_{WT} and a second input 18_{IN2} connected to bit location 0 of read shift register SR_{RD} . The output of AND gate 18_{AND} provides a COLLISION signal, which in the present example is active high. Thus, when a collision is detected at the sampled bit locations, a collision between read pointer PTR_{RD} and write pointer PTR_{WT} is occurring and the COLLISION signal is high; otherwise, the COLLISION signal is low.

[0029] The binary states stored in write shift register SR_{WT} and read shift register SR_{RD} of Figure 3a are the same as those shown in Figure 1. As a result, these shift register values either provide, or are tracking, read pointer PTR_{RD} pointing to storage location SL_0 and write pointer PTR_{WT} pointing to storage location SL_8 . Thus, no collision is presently occurring since those pointers indicate different storage locations within FIFO memory 12. In connection with AND gate 18_{AND} of collision detecting circuit 18, one skilled in the art will appreciate that it correctly provides a low COLLISION signal in response to the binary states in bit location 0 of the two shift registers. Specifically, input 18_{IN1} receives a binary value of one from bit location 0 of write shift register SR_{WT} , and input 18_{IN2} receives a binary value of zero from bit location 0 of read shift register SR_{RD} . Thus, these inputs provide a low output for the COLLISION signal.

[0030] Looking now to Figure 3b, it again illustrates system 10₁, but it further depicts an instance of a pointer collision. Specifically, the binary states stored in write shift register SR_{WT} and read shift register SR_{RD} of Figure 3b are those which would exist, by way of example, following the state of Figure 3a and eight cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} . As a result, these shift register values either provide, or are tracking, read pointer PTR_{RD} pointing to storage location SL_0 and write pointer PTR_{WT} also pointing to storage location SL_0 . Thus, a collision is presently occurring because those pointers indicate a same storage location within FIFO memory 12. In connection with AND gate 18_{AND} of collision detecting circuit 18, one skilled in the art will appreciate that it correctly provides a high COLLISION signal in response to these binary states in bit location 0 of the two shift registers. Specifically, input 18_{IN1} receives a binary value of one from bit location 0 of write shift register SR_{WT} and input 18_{IN2} receives a binary value of one from bit location 0 of read shift register SR_{RD} . These inputs provide a high output for the COLLISION signal.

[0031] The preceding demonstrates a preferred embodiment that operates to detect a collision of read and write pointers in a FIFO system. Note that the preferred embodiment achieves its result with a key benefit over the prior art. Specifically, the use of read and write shift registers, advanced by respective read and write clock cycles, permits an instantaneous comparison of a common single bit location in each of the shift registers. As

such, there is no need to capture a multiple-bit pointer vector in one clock domain and to take that vector into the clock domain of the other pointer. Further, the collision detection of the preferred embodiment may be implemented in a single logic stage, that is, selected bits are connected to logic where the serial path through that logic only passes through a single gate to provide an indication of a FIFO collision. As such, the collision detection may be achieved with considerably less complexity as compared to the prior art, thereby reducing device size and cost. As another benefit of the preferred embodiment, it may be modified to provide additional embodiments, where certain examples of such embodiments are shown below. As still another benefit, given the asynchronous nature of read clock CLK_{RD} and write clock CLK_{WT} , the overlap between two binary ones in the respective shift registers may be for a short period of time, where that shortness in the prior art of an overlap of vector pointers required considerable complexity to accurately detect. In contrast, all that is required in the preferred embodiment is the triggering of a single logic gate. Note also in this regard and for purposes of additional response to the detected collision, the high output of the detecting AND gate may be connected to additional circuitry (not shown) that may be included in detecting circuit 18. For example, the output of the detecting AND gate may be connected as a clear input to two cascaded flip flops, in which case a collision indication, even if detected by the AND gate for a very short period of time, is then effectively extended in time as it is clocked through the cascaded flip flops. With this extended asserted COLLISION signal, FIFO memory 12 may be reset in response to the detected collision, such as by again positioning the binary sequences in the shift registers in the positions indicated in Figure 1 and also marking the data in FIFO memory 12 invalid. Still other synchronization techniques in response to the detected collision may be ascertained by one skilled in the art.

[0032] Figure 4a illustrates system 10₁ of Figures 3a and 3b, with additional aspects and for sake of distinction the system is shown and referred to as system 10₂. System 10₂ includes various of the same components of system 10₁, where the reference numbers for these same items are carried forward from Figures 3a and 3b into Figure 4a and the reader is referred to the previous discussion for details on such aspects. Looking to the additional aspects of system 10₂ over system 10₁, system 10₂ also includes an AND gate having an

input connected to bit location 0 of write shift register SR_{WT} and an input connected to bit location 0 of read shift register SR_{RD} , however for sake of distinction from Figure 3a, in Figure 4a this AND gate is identified as AND gate 18_{AND0} . Indeed, system 10_2 also includes additional respective AND gates, each having one input connected to a bit location of write shift register SR_{WT} and another input connected to a respective same bit location of read shift register SR_{RD} . For example, an AND gate 18_{AND1} has a first input connected to bit location 1 of write shift register SR_{WT} and a second input connected to bit location 1 of read shift register SR_{RD} . As another example, an AND gate 18_{AND2} has a first input connected to bit location 2 of write shift register SR_{WT} and a second input connected to bit location 2 of read shift register SR_{RD} . Additional AND gates are included up to and including the final bit location of the shift registers, that is, an AND gate 18_{AND15} has a first input connected to bit location 15 of write shift register SR_{WT} and a second input connected to bit location 15 of read shift register SR_{RD} . Thus, it may be stated by way of summary that each AND gate 18_{ANDx} has a first input connected to a bit location x of write shift register SR_{WT} and a second input connected to the bit location x of read shift register SR_{RD} . Lastly, by way of introduction, the binary states stored in write shift register SR_{WT} and read shift register SR_{RD} of Figure 4a are the reset values as shown and described above with respect to Figure 3a and Figure 1. Thus, with these binary states in Figure 4a, no collision is occurring and, hence, each AND gate 18_{AND0} through 18_{AND15} provides a logic low output (i.e., no collision is detected).

[0033] Figure 4b illustrates the continuing operation of system 10_2 following the preceding state in Figure 4a, where Figure 4b illustrates system 10_2 following a total of four additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and of twelve additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD} . Again, the clock cycles are asynchronous with respect to one another and may occur in various fashions whereby certain ones of the cycles in one domain may be interspersed between cycles in the other domain. In response to the additional clock cycles, each shift register advances its stored binary state in the same manner as described in previous examples, so that the sole value of one in write shift register SR_{WT} is at its bit location 12 and so that the sole value of one in read shift register SR_{RD} is at its bit location 12. Consequently, these bit location values provide, or track, the positioning of write

pointer PTR_{WT} and read pointer PT_{RD} , both of which indicate word storage location SL_{12} in FIFO memory 12.

[0034] Given that, in Figure 4b, write pointer PTR_{WT} and read pointer PTR_{RD} both indicate a same position in FIFO memory 12, then by definition a pointer collision is occurring. Further, recall that a two-input AND gate 18_{AND12} has its two inputs connected, respectively, to bit location 12 of write shift register SR_{WT} and read shift register SR_{RD} . Thus, given the binary value of one in the common bit location 12 of those shift registers, in Figure 4b the output of AND gate 18_{AND12} will be high, thereby indicating the collision event. Further, at this time, the output of the other 15 AND gates 18_{AND0} through 18_{AND11} and 18_{AND13} through 18_{AND15} will be low. However, while not shown, if the preferred detection is only to determine that a collision has occurred and with no desire to identify the word storage location at which the collision occurred, then the outputs of all AND gates 18_{ANDx} may be logically OR'd so that if any one of those outputs is high, then a pointer collision is thereby detected by that high output. Conversely, where such an OR'd output (or all outputs of all AND gates 18_{ANDx}) is low, then no pointer collision is then occurring.

[0035] By comparing system 10_2 (Figures 4a and 4b) with system 10_1 (Figures 3a and 3b), one skilled in the art will appreciate that in either instance a high output from an AND gate indicates a pointer collision. In system 10_2 , a collision of the pointers at any word storage location SL_x in FIFO memory 12 is detectable, while in system 10_1 , a collision at only one of the word storage locations (e.g., SL_0) in FIFO memory 12 is detectable. Thus, a trade-off exists as between the two embodiments in that system 10_2 will detect any collision, but in doing so requires M AND gates for a FIFO with M word storage locations. Alternatively, system 10_1 detects only a collision at a single storage location in FIFO memory 12, but given that the read and write clocks are assumed to be relatively the same in frequency over time, then such an approach may be acceptable because within a period of time, which may be deemed acceptable in various implementations, an undetected collision that occurs in a word storage location other than the one to which the AND gate is connected also will be followed by a detected collision at the word storage location

(e.g., SL0) that is monitored by an AND gate. Further, still other embodiments may be implemented with a different number of AND gates as between the extremes of systems 10₁ and 10₂, that is, for a FIFO with M word storage locations, then a number of AND gates between 1 and M , such as $M/2$, also may be implemented where each such AND gate has its inputs connected to a different pair of like-positioned bit locations in write and read shift registers SR_{WT} and SR_{RD}, respectively.

[0036] Figure 5a illustrates a system 10₃ that is the same as system 10₂ of Figures 4a and 4b, with a modification to the binary string stored in both shift registers SR_{WT} and SR_{RD} and thereby presenting yet another alternative preferred embodiment. Particularly, in system 10₃, again each of shift registers SR_{WT} and SR_{RD} stores a set of binary values that includes a single one that provides or tracks a respective pointer, and in the example illustrated those values of one are located at the above-discussed preferred reset position. Thus, a binary one is stored in bit location 0 of read shift register SR_{RD} thereby corresponding to word storage location SL0 in FIFO memory 12, and a binary one is stored in bit location 8 of write shift register SR_{WT} thereby corresponding to word storage location SL8 in FIFO memory 12. However, each set of binary values, in a shift register, also includes one or more additional binary values of one that are contiguous to another binary value of one. In the example shown, in write shift register SR_{WT}, a binary value of one is also stored in bit location 7 and bit location 9, thus providing three contiguous binary values of one in that register. Also in the example shown, in read shift register SR_{RD}, a binary value of one is also stored in bit location 1 and bit location 15, thus providing three contiguous binary values of one in that register (recognizing that bit location 15 is considered contiguous to bit location 0 due to the wraparound nature of the shift register). As detailed below, the additional binary values of one in each such shift register operate as a guard band for detecting a near-collision event.

[0037] Figure 5b illustrates the continuing operation of system 10₃ following the preceding state in Figure 5a, where Figure 5b illustrates system 10₃ following a total of six additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and of eleven additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD}. In response to the six write clock cycles, the centered value of one in write shift

register SR_{WT} is located at bit location 14, thereby causing, or tracking, the positioning of write pointer PTR_{WT} to word storage location SL14 in FIFO memory 12. In response to the eleven read clock cycles, the centered value of one in read shift register SR_{RD} is located at bit location 11, thereby causing, or tracking, the positioning of read pointer PTR_{RD} to word storage location SL11 in FIFO memory 12. Given the relative positioning of the binary values of one in both of the shift registers, note that none of the AND gates in system 10₃ receives an input of one at both of its two inputs. Accordingly, there is no collision detected, which is appropriate in that write pointer PTR_{WT} and read pointer PTR_{RD} are pointing to different locations within FIFO memory 12.

[0038] Figure 5c illustrates the continuing operation of system 10₃ following the preceding state in Figure 5b, where Figure 5c illustrates system 10₃ following a total of three additional cycles of write clock CLK_{WT} and of four additional cycles of read clock CLK_{RD} . In response to the three write clock cycles, the centered value of one (i.e., the one in the middle of the guard band) in write shift register SR_{WT} is located at bit location 1, thereby causing, or tracking, the positioning of write pointer PTR_{WT} to word storage location SL1 in FIFO memory 12. In response to the four read clock cycles, the centered value of one in read shift register SR_{RD} is located at bit location 15, thereby causing, or tracking, the positioning of read pointer PTR_{RD} to word storage location SL15 in FIFO memory 12.

[0039] Given the relative positioning of the pointers in Figure 5c, no actual collision has yet occurred. However, with the addition of the guard band binary values of one in both of the shift registers, note further that AND gate 18_{AND0} receives a binary value of one at both of its inputs; accordingly, the output of that AND gate 18_{AND0} is high, which in the embodiment of system 10₃ is understood to mean that either an actual collision is occurring, or given the guard band created by the additional binary one adjacent each side of the centered binary one in each binary state stored in a shift register, a high output from an AND gate also may indicate that the guard band of one register is overlapping a value of one in the other register, meaning either a collision will occur in the next two clock cycles, is occurring, or occurred in the preceding two clock cycles. In any event, with the

guard band, then a reset or other corrective action may be taken in response to any of these three occurrences. In addition, note that for either the implementation of a version of system 10 without a guard band or with a guard band, the number of bits in a shift register set to a value of one is preferably less than the number of contiguous bits that are set to zero, so as to provide the detection functionality while not eliminating too many usable locations in FIFO memory 12 because the greater number of bits equal to one, the fewer the number of successive clock cycles that may occur for one or the other clock cycle without causing a collision or a near-collision. Moreover, note that the size of the guard band (i.e., the number of binary ones in the illustrated example) in one shift register need not necessarily be the same as the size of the guard band of the other shift register.

[0040] From the above, it may be appreciated that the above embodiments provide a FIFO memory circuit memory system with a single bit indication of a word pointer. The single bit corresponds to the FIFO word storage location indicated by the word pointer in that it may provide, or track, the pointer, and this approach provides various benefits. As an example, with this approach, both the read and write pointers may be represented by respective shift registers, where in those registers a single binary state (e.g., one) corresponds to the FIFO word storage location indicated by the respective word pointer. The correspondence between the single shifted binary one and the respective FIFO pointer may be direct whereby the binary one provides the FIFO pointer or indirect whereby the binary one tracks the FIFO pointer, such as being advanced each time the FIFO pointer is advanced (or once for every R times the FIFO pointer is advanced). Moreover, note that the correspondence between the single shifted binary one and the respective FIFO pointer may involve an offset between the two. In other words, the preceding has demonstrated examples where the binary value of one has a same bit location in a shift register as the corresponding word storage location in FIFO memory 12, that is, at a bit location m in a shift register corresponds to a pointer indication of word storage location m in FIFO memory 12. Alternatively, the selected value of one (or zero) may still correspond to a word storage location with a known offset as between the bit locations in the shift register and the word storage location in FIFO memory 12. As another example, with that indication, an additional aspect permits comparison of the binary states in the two shift

registers so that a collision is detected, either as an absolute collision when using a single bit in a state that is complementary to all other bits in the shift register, or as a guard banded collision when using a group of contiguous bits in a state that is complementary to all other bits in the shift register. As still another example, the comparison may be achieved with a single stage of logic (e.g., AND) and without requiring a complex capture of an entire pointer vector in one clock domain and the transfer of that vector into the other pointer's domain so as to detect collision. As yet another example, the preferred embodiments are readily scalable for different sized FIFOs having differing number of word storage locations and differing numbers of word sizes. In all such approaches, further benefits are realized in that the overall size, complexity, power consumption, and cost of the FIFO and hence the system using the FIFO is reduced. As a final example, the preferred embodiments include variations described above, where certain of those variations may be further applied within the illustrated embodiments; for example, the guard band approach of Figures 5a and 5b may be implemented with less than M AND gates as illustrated in the non-guard band case of Figures 3a and 3b. Still further, other examples exist and/or may be ascertained by one skilled in the art. For example, while the binary value of one has been shown to be the minority value in each shift register and corresponding to the location of the respective word storage location, a simple complement may be made to the above illustrations where the majority value in each shift register is a binary one while a binary zero, with or without additional zeroes as a guard band, corresponds to the pointer location of the respective word storage location in FIFO memory 12. Thus, these examples provide yet other bases from which one skilled in the art may ascertain yet other benefits and variations, and indeed while the present embodiments have been described in detail, various substitutions, modifications or alterations could be made to the descriptions set forth above without departing from the inventive scope which is defined by the following claims.